

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Wednesday, February 16, 2005

SIXTEEN MOONSHINE STILLS SEIZED BY ABC AGENTS

(Gluckstadt, MS) During the past twelve months, agents of the Alcohol Beverage Control division of the state Tax Commission seized and destroyed a total of sixteen illegal moonshine distilleries in Mississippi including over 6500 gallons of mash. Twelve stills were found in the east central area of Mississippi in Lowndes, Winston, Neshoba, Kemper, Choctaw, and Rankin counties.

While the number of moonshine stills seized by agents in the past year does not compare to the over 400 seized in the first year of the ABC's existence, 1966-67, there remains a demand for moonshine in Mississippi. People purchase moonshine because it is cheaper than legal whiskey and because some simply prefer its taste. Violators motivated by profit continue to meet that demand. On the average, a violator will net 60-65% of the gross sales of his illegal product. The average wholesale cost of a gallon of moonshine is between \$15.00 and \$25.00 resulting in lost federal and state tax from these stills of over \$2 million per year. The penalty for possession of illegal alcoholic beverages can be a misdemeanor or a felony depending upon the number of violations; possession of a distillery or an integral part thereof is a felony.

There are health concerns for those who consume moonshine because it is made in unsanitary conditions. ABC agents have discovered dead animals such as rodents, raccoons, and opossums in mash barrels. One agent seized moonshine that had been stored in a used paint thinner container with its label still attached. Another major health concern is lead poisoning due to the solder or welds on the cookers and condensers.

While the number of violators is significantly less than in years past, their operations today are much more sophisticated. Commonly, moonshine stills were located outside in wooded areas. Today, a large number of the illicit distilleries are located in an enclosed shed or a building near the violator's home operating without attracting attention. Production methods vary by violator, as example in their personal preferences for cookers or the type of grain used. Cookers are commonly cypress wood, copper, or stainless steel. While most illegal distillers prefer to use corn due to its low cost, there are those who believe rye grain makes the best whiskey. Several of the violators in east central Mississippi pride themselves in selling what is commonly referred to as "sealed" whiskey giving the appearance of a cleaner product because the purchaser knows that the container was not previously used. A few of the violators will charter, or darken, the color of the moonshine by aging it for a few weeks in recycled whiskey kegs; however, most simply will add cola to give it the amber color. In either case, the charter color raises the moonshine's price per gallon.

In the early years of the ABC, most of the agent's time was focused on searching for and ceasing the illegal production and distribution of moonshine whiskey. Today, however, the agents of the ABC spend the largest portion of their time investigating applicants for permits, or, investigating complaints against licensed retailers as well as those who illegally sell beer and liquor. The agents of today may not get to spend the time once spent on moonshine investigations, but they find nothing more rewarding than to break up an illegal distillery operation.

DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHS ARE AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST

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